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ABSTRACT

In fiscal year 1983 nearly 1,500 Alaskan children under the age of 6 received Head Start services from a total of 262 staff members--149 of whom were classroom personnel--and 1,473 volunteers. Over 700 Head Start children received medical screening, and more than 100 needed and received medical treatment through Head Start. Over 800 Head Start children received dental exams, and more than 200 needed and completed dental treatment. Alaska Head Start programs enrolled and provided special services to 164 children with a variety of handicapping conditions. A total of 1,094 families received services from Head Start. The State of Alaska currently provides 40% of the Alaska Headstart funds, a significant contribution which is used to improve the overall quality of services to children and families as well as to meet the costs of providing Headstart services in rural and remote Alaska, e.g., fuel and transportation costs, materials to meet local cultural needs, and the purchase of medical and other support services. Increased funding is needed for Headstart to serve children currently on waiting lists, increase training opportunities for staff and volunteers, and purchase or construct Head Start facilities. (JHZ)

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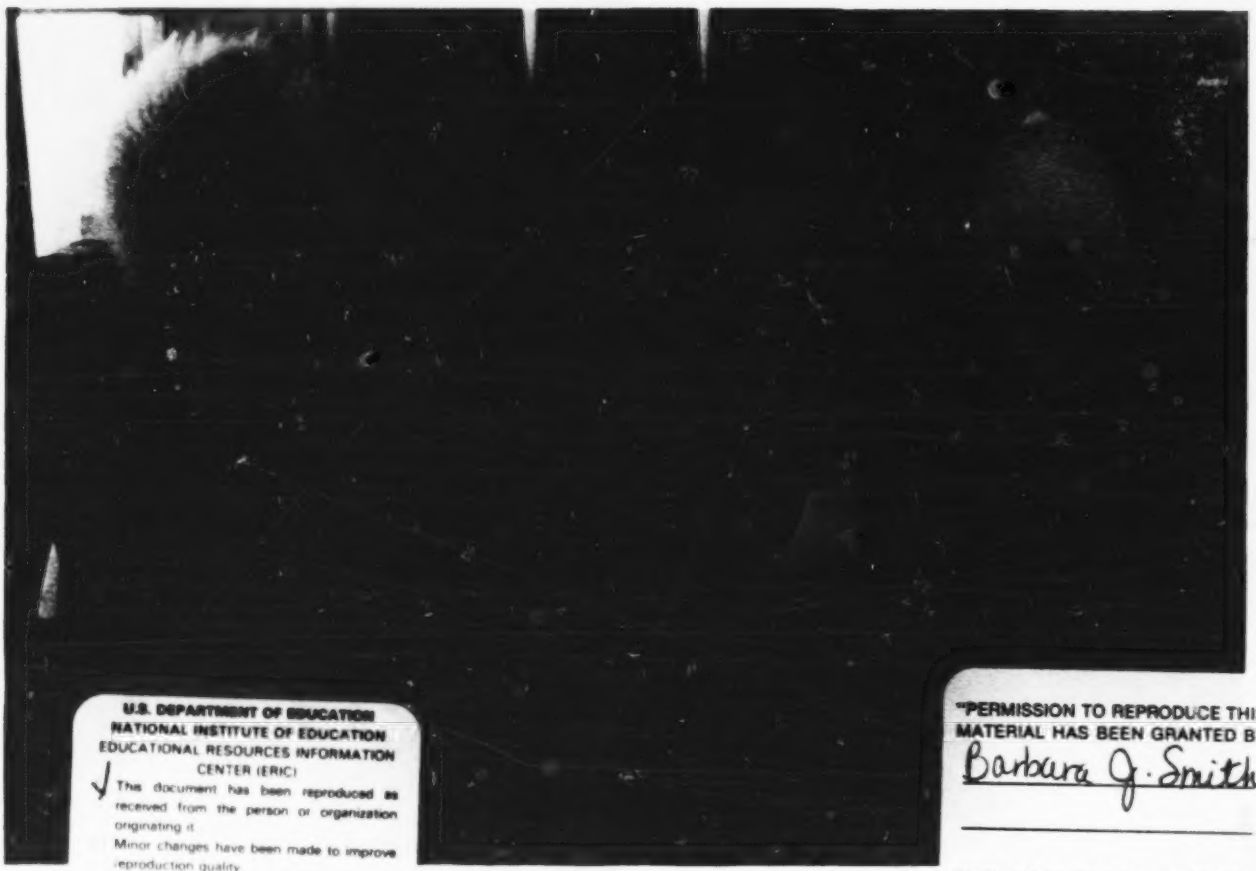

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A Promise For Alaska's Children and Families

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This report is dedicated to those who work so hard,

for so little, so that

some may have "a little Head Start . . ."

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Head Start: A Promise For Alaska's Children and Families

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The Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs funded this project, which was conceived and guided by members of the Alaska Head Start Director's Association (AHSDA). These members are:

Joann Contini	Rural Alaska Community Action Program
Marilyn Webb	Rural Alaska Community Action Program
Sandi Haynes	Rural Alaska Community Action Program
Phil Gilbert	Greater Fairbanks Head Start Association
Mary Trosper	Chugiak Children's Services
Marge Bainton	Assoc. of Village Council Presidents
Jo Putman	Kawerak, Inc.
Adele Roberts	Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indians
Margaret Bolton	Metlakatla Indian Community
Mary Dalton	Cook Inlet Native Association
Sarah Turner	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Carol Landt	Upper Tanana Parent-Child Program
Sharon Hodgins	Yukon-Kuskokwim Parent-Child Program
Sharon Fortier	Resource Access Project
Hilary Hardwick	Resource Access Project

I appreciate that each of these individuals spent substantial time and energy trying to capture for me the essence of Head Start. To capture in words something to which these people have dedicated their lives is nearly impossible. Any inadequacies in this respect, therefore, come from my writing, not from their hearts.

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— Barbara J. Smith, Ph.D.
Early Childhood Coordination Project
Anchorage, Alaska

June 1984

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"At no other time in their lives will these children learn so much. They benefit enormously from the Head Start program."

— Head Start Parent

"I believe Head Start is most important because my son went last year. He had a speech defect and Head Start did miracles in halting his defect. He takes real interest in Kindergarten now . . . Education should be the number one priority above all projects."

— Head Start Parent

"I know a woman that was a Head Start student in 1966 in a rural Alaskan community that still lives in the same community and now works full time as a health aide. I also know a Head Start parent that was a local Head Start Parent Committee Chairperson, became the Chairperson for the Statewide Parent Committee, and went on to college to study social work. She is now planning to do graduate work at Berkeley."

— Head Start Administrator

Executive Summary

Project Head Start was created by Congress in 1965 to help disadvantaged preschool children. Preschool years are a time of rapid intellectual, physical and social development. Many skills we use as adults are learned during our first six years of life. Therefore, Head Start attempts to bring together resources such as health care, education, proper nutrition, social and special services that will help disadvantaged children and their families during these critical early years. Head Start seeks to develop the child's readiness for school and skills necessary to function successfully in school and elsewhere.

Head Start is recognized as one of the most cost-effective social programs for disadvantaged children and their families. The goals of the program are to improve children's health, aid in their social and intellectual development through early childhood education, and help the child and family gain self-respect, confidence and independence. National studies report that Head Start children do better than their peers in school, are healthier, and that Head Start has a positive effect on families and communities.

One of the unique features of Head Start is its emphasis on local control. In order to help assure that each program reflects the needs of the families and children within each community, grants from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services are given directly to local and regional agencies, which control the federal funds.

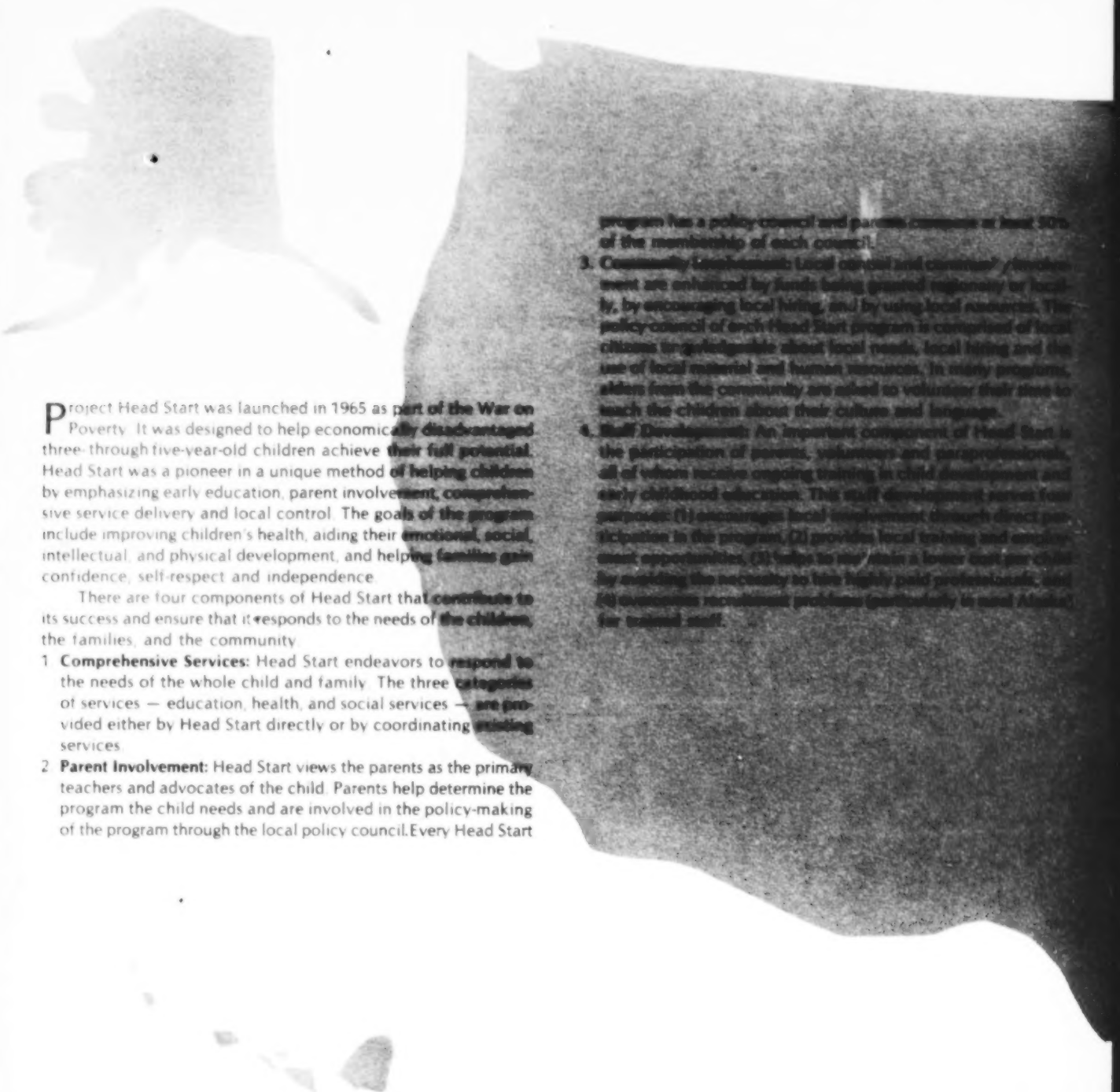
Head Start programs have been in Alaska for 20 years. Currently, there are nine grants to local Head Start agencies in Alaska for the administration of more than 50 local programs. In fiscal year 1983 (FY83) nearly 1,500 Alaskan children under the age of 6 received Head Start services from a total of 262 staff members — 149 of whom were classroom personnel — and 1,473 volunteers. Over 700 Head Start children received medical screening in FY83, and more than 100 of them needed and received medical treatment through Head Start. Over 800 Head Start children received dental exams during FY83, and more than 200 needed and completed dental treatment. Also in FY83, Alaska Head Start programs enrolled and provided special services to 164 children with a variety of handicapping conditions. A total of 1,094 families received services from Head Start.

These and many more services were available through a budget comprised of 60% federal and 40% state dollars. To its credit, Alaska ranks among the top states for its state financial contribution to the Head Start success story. Without the state share for Head Start funding, the services for as many as 400 families and 500 children would have been in jeopardy; nearly 100 local people, from teacher aides to school bus drivers, would not have been employed by Head Start; 280 children may not have received medical screening, and nearly 60 handicapped children may not have received the special services provided by Head Start. The state dollars are vitally important. Without the funds, the quality of services provided to the children and their families would have been greatly reduced.

Because of this Alaskan commitment to Head Start, the future for local programs and services to children and families is promising. However, there is much to be done and many local needs to be met. For example, demand for Head Start services surpasses Head Start resources. Nearly every Head Start program has a waiting list of eligible children, and many families will never have the opportunity to benefit from the program because their children will outgrow the age of eligibility before an opening is available. Providing medical and dental services to children in remote and rural areas is also a problem. As a result, only about 50% of the Alaska Head Start children were screened in 1983, although the goal is that all children will be screened.

These and other problems unique to Alaska, such as transportation difficulties and the availability of culturally relevant materials and curricula, continue to necessitate a significant state commitment to the program. Head Start shares many of the same challenges as other early childhood programs: an increasing need for child care settings, appropriate early education programs and trained staff, and the need to ensure that all young Alaskan children have the basic social and educational environment to help them grow and flourish. Funding continues to be needed to: (a) improve and provide needed services, (b) increase staff and volunteer opportunities, and (c) purchase or construct Head Start facilities. Furthermore, the unique and effective components of Head Start such as volunteerism, ongoing staff training, parent involvement and education, and comprehensive child development and family services, should be shared with other early childhood programs. With continued state and local commitment to Head Start, through fiscal and administrative resources, Head Start will be able to maintain its promise to many of Alaska's children and their families.

Head Start:



Project Head Start was launched in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty. It was designed to help economically disadvantaged three- through five-year-old children achieve their full potential. Head Start was a pioneer in a unique method of helping children by emphasizing early education, parent involvement, comprehensive service delivery and local control. The goals of the program include improving children's health, aiding their emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development, and helping families gain confidence, self-respect and independence.

There are four components of Head Start that contribute to its success and ensure that it responds to the needs of the children, the families, and the community.

1. **Comprehensive Services:** Head Start endeavors to respond to the needs of the whole child and family. The three categories of services — education, health, and social services — are provided either by Head Start directly or by coordinating existing services.
2. **Parent Involvement:** Head Start views the parents as the primary teachers and advocates of the child. Parents help determine the program the child needs and are involved in the policy-making of the program through the local policy council. Every Head Start program has a policy council and parents compose at least 50% of the membership of each council.
3. **Community Involvement:** Local interest and community involvement are enhanced by funds being granted regionally or locally, by encouraging local hiring, and by using local resources. The policy council of each Head Start program is comprised of local citizens to give guidance about local needs, local hiring and the use of local material and human resources. In many programs, elders from the community are asked to volunteer their time to teach the children about their culture and language.
4. **Staff Development:** An important component of Head Start is the participation of parents, volunteers and paraprofessionals, all of whom receive ongoing training in child development and early childhood education. This staff development serves four purposes: (1) encourages local involvement through direct participation in the program, (2) provides local training and employment opportunities, (3) helps to stay state a lower staff per child by avoiding the necessity to hire highly paid professionals, and (4) overcomes recruitment problems (particularly in rural Alaska) for trained staff.

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Nationally

A recent national report (Hubbell, 1983) on the effectiveness of Head Start across the nation confirmed that when Head Start children are compared to other low-income children:

- Head Start children score better on standardized tests and measures of school readiness;
- Head Start children achieve more progress in school and are less likely to fail a grade, drop out, or require special education classes;
- Head Start children are more likely to receive adequate medical care and be of normal height and weight, with fewer absences from school due to illness;
- Head Start children with speech impairments and learning disabilities perform better on some measures of cognitive and intellectual tests than their non-Head Start peers.

Furthermore, other studies report:

- Head Start programs have a positive effect on families and communities by encouraging parent involvement, providing jobs and services, and encouraging coordination of social services.
- The vast majority of Head Start children receive medical screenings, treatment and immunizations. The immunization rate for Head Start children is 20% higher than the national average for poor children.
- Head Start has provided jobs for over 400,000 Head Start parents and community residents.

The success and efficiency of Head Start is largely a product of three requirements of the program:

1) A commitment to ongoing staff training and development which is supported by special training grants and programs.
2) Performance standards which measure the various components of each program annually.
3) The requirement that the Head Start dollar be the "dollar of last resort" necessitating a coordinated and effective use of state, local and other federal resources.

However, even in the face of this 20-year national success story, Head Start is only large enough to serve 17% of those children and their families who are eligible for the program throughout the nation. In Alaska, virtually all programs have waiting lists of children and have difficulty in providing support services such as medical, dental and social services.

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Head Start: In Alaska

History

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Background

In Alaska, nine regional federal grantees administer over fifty local programs. The grantees are: the Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP), the Greater Fairbanks Head Start Association, Chugiak Children's Services, and the six grantees that focus on Alaskan Native needs under Head Start's Indian-Migrant Program Division. Those six are: the Association of Village Council Presidents (Bethel), the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indians (Juneau), Cook Inlet Native Association (Anchorage), Kawerak, Inc. (Nome), the Metlakatla Indian Community (Metlakatla), and the Tanana Chiefs Conference (Fairbanks). In addition to these nine federal grantees, the Upper Tanana Parent-Child Program, serving Northway, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Mentasta, Eagle and Dot Lake, is solely state funded and administered through RurAL CAP.

The following information describes the grantees and the program locations, and is accompanied by a map noting all Alaskan Head Start programs.

Grantees

Region X Programs

RurAL CAP Head Start
Joann Contini, Director
Rural Alaska Community Action Program
P.O. Box 3-3908, Anchorage, AK 99510
Phone (907) 279-2511

Classroom Sites: Alakanuk, Anchorage, Chevak, Emmonak, Fortuna Ledge, Galena, Gambell, Haines, Hooper Bay, Huslia, Hydaburg, Kake, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Kwethluk, Mountain Village, Napaskiak, Savoonga, Seward, Stebbins, Toksook Bay and Unalakleet

Upper Tanana Parent-Child Program
Carol Landt, Director
Rural Alaska Community Action Program
P.O. Box 415
Tok, AK 99780
Phone (907) 883-4691

Classroom Sites: Northway, Tanacross, Tetlin, Tok, Mentasta, Eagle and Dot Lake

Yukon-Kuskokwim Parent-Child Program
Sharon Hodgins, Supervisor
Rural Alaska Community Action Program
P.O. Box 925
Bethel, AK 99559
Phone (907) 543-3401

Classroom Sites: Akiachak, Eek, Kasigluk, Pilot Station, Scammon Bay, and Tuntutuliak

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Greater Fairbanks Head Start Association
Phil Gilbert, Director
P.O. Box 724
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone (907) 356-1212 or 1213

Classroom Sites: Fairbanks

Chugiak Children's Services
Mary Trosper, Director
P.O. Box 233
Chugiak, AK 99567
Phone (907) 688-2660

Classroom Sites: Chugiak

Indian-Migrant Program Division

Association of Village Council Presidents
Marge Bainton, Head Start Director
P.O. Box 219
Bethel, AK 99559
Phone (907) 543-3521

Classroom Sites: Bethel, Russian Mission, Kotlik, Pilot Station, Akiak, and Akiachak

Kawarak, Inc.
Jo Putman, Head Start Director
P.O. Box 948
Nome, AK 99762
Phone (907) 443-5231 or 2503

Classroom Sites: Nome, Wales, and St. Michael

Central Council of Tlingit & Haida
Adele Roberts, Head Start Director
320 W. Willoughby, Suite 300
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone (907) 586-1432

Classroom Sites: Hoonah, Juneau, Klawock, Sitka, Craig, and Angoon

Metlakatla Indian Community
Margaret Bolton, Head Start Director
P.O. Box 8
Metlakatla, AK 99926
Phone (907) 886-5151

Classroom Sites: Metlakatla

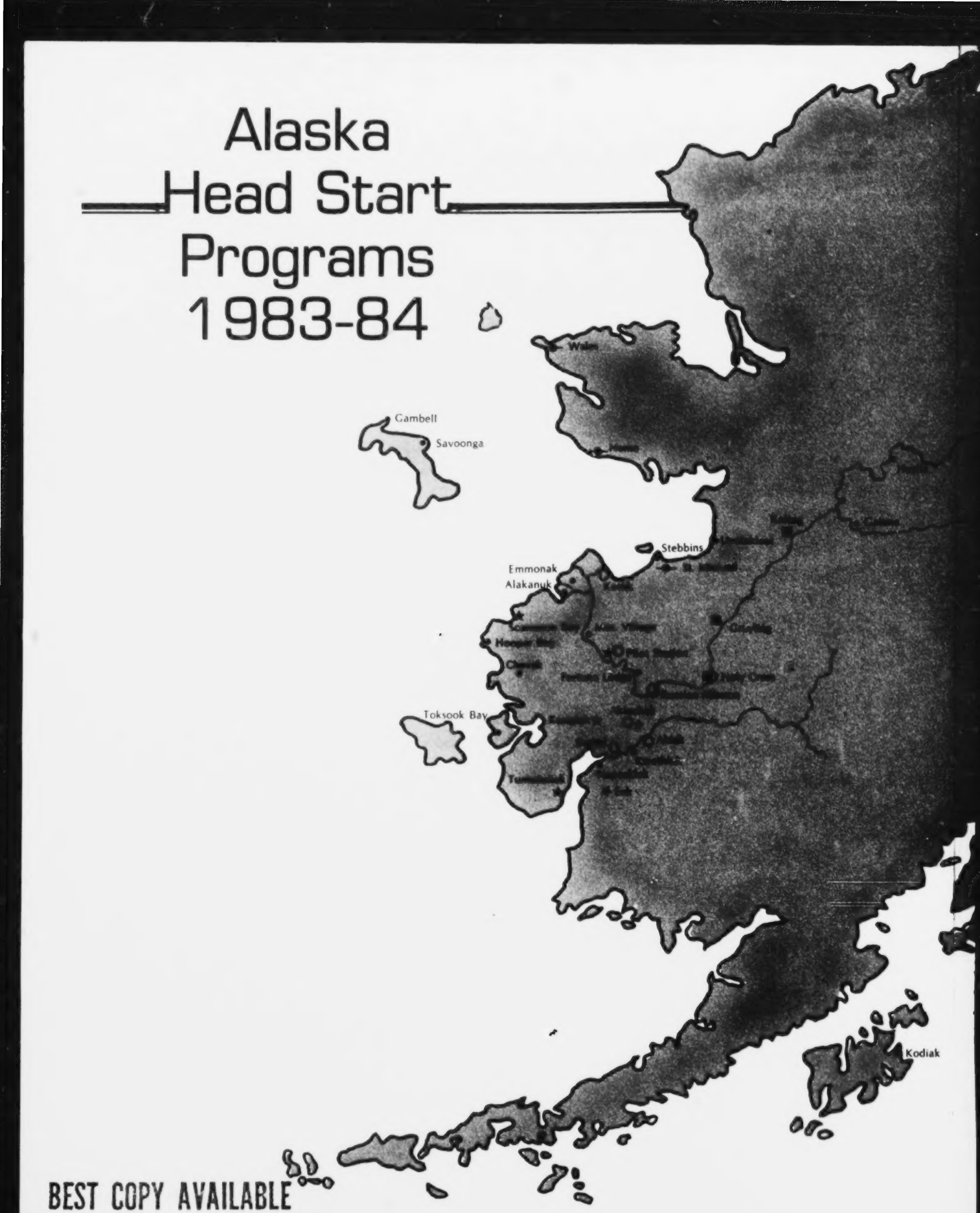
Cook Inlet Native Association
Mary Dalton, Head Start Director
670 West Fireweed Lane
Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone (907) 278-4641

Classroom Sites: Anchorage

Tanana Chiefs Conference
Sarah Turner, Head Start Director
201 First Avenue, Doyon Building
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone (907) 452-8251

Classroom Sites: Kaltag, Grayling, Holy Cross and Tanana

Alaska Head Start Programs 1983-84



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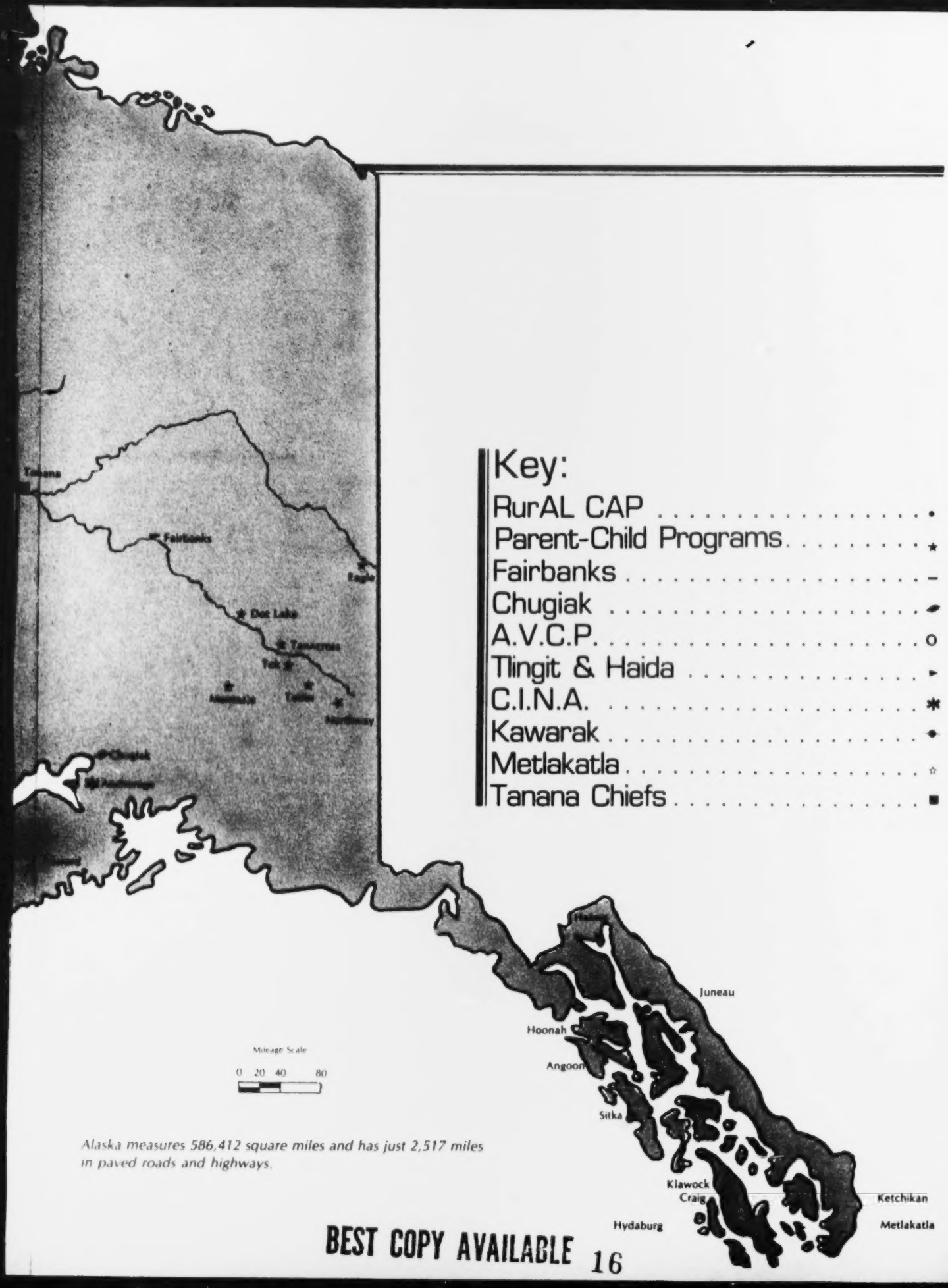

Alaska measures 586,412 square miles and has just 2,517 miles in paved roads and highways.

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Services

The window on the south side of the Head Start building opens and a small child smiles in delight when she hears her very own teacher say, "Here comes Sunni, walking to school by herself! You can make it Sunni. You're such a big girl!"

The door opens and the teacher aide greets Sunni, comments on her new mukluks and waits for her to find the "cubby." It has her name printed by her picture. She takes off her parka and hangs it up, while telling the aide that her mother is coming to help after she sends her other children off to school. The teacher checks the volunteer calendar to see who else will help that day. The children are scheduled to go to the "big school" gym, and extra hands are needed.

Sunni looks around the room at her choices. She can play in the block area, dramatic play, the quiet area, or the "big muscle" space where the small slide is set up for exercise and motor development.

As the rest of the children come into the center, the cook, the aide, and the teacher greet each by name and help them choose an activity to start the day.

Breakfast is served family style with children finding their name tags at the table after they have washed their hands.

At small group time, Sunni sits at a round table with the teacher director, who is playing a language game that stresses the concepts of "over" and "under." Across the room, red and yellow paint jars are set up at an easel. She makes a discovery about color as the red and yellow paint runs together.

The cook comes out of the kitchen and reminds Sunni that she is the helper today. Sunni puts the donated salmon strips from Albert's grandmother on plates for each table. She counts out bowls for each child. The other helpers set the table as the rest of the children wash their hands. The teacher picks up name tags as she hands out flouride tablets. The children eat and talk with each other and the adults at the table about the texture, color, taste of the food and the new baby at Myrna's house. Someone shouts, "Joanna is a good cook! Yum!"

Each child brushes his or her teeth after lunch and then a few at a time go to the "blue rug" to talk and listen to the "Johnson-O'Malley" teacher. She comes from the elementary school to teach the Native language through songs and stories.

Soon it's time to go home. The door opens, and grandparents, mothers, fathers, brothers come in to Head Start. Some get a cup of coffee and wait for children to finish their books and building projects. The teacher hands out the center newsletter that tells parents what the menu is for next week, what math concepts children will be introduced to, the volunteers' names and a summary of last week's activities, including the new Native language words. There is also an evaluation sheet on the program she asks them to fill out and bring back.

The last child leaves. The staff each go about their specific duties before getting together to plan for each child for the following day. The teacher and teacher aide talk about home visits to explain the results of the developmental screening. The cook checks the freezer for the moose roast for tomorrow's luncheon with the Head Start staff and the elders. The janitor comes back from the air strip with boxes from Anchorage that contain films, books, food and vacuum cleaner bags!

The staff members have loved and taught their own children, and their neighbors' and relatives' children for several years in this building. Head Start is a good place for adults, as well as the children . . . now if they could just get a new rug, some extra drums for fuel oil . . . and some special help for Sunni's little brother . . .

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Children and families in Alaska are eligible for Head Start services if (a) they meet the income requirements, (b) live in remote areas deemed to be in "poverty access" to comprehensive services, or (c) are handicapped. Head Start was mandated by Congress in the mid-1970s to make 10% of the total enrollment available to handicapped children.

Alaska Head Start receives 60% of its funding from the federal government through the Administration for Children, Youth & Families, and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; 40% from the state government through the Alaska Department of Community & Regional Affairs.

Programs differ from locale to locale, but follow one of three general models:

(a) Center based programs are for children 3 years of age through compulsory school age and occur in classroom settings.
(b) Home based programs are for children 3 years old through compulsory school age and occur at home.
(c) Parent-Child Programs provide prenatal services and services for children from birth to 3 years and occur at home.

Center based Head Start programs give children the chance to explore the bigger world outside their home in a safe, stimulating and comfortable environment. Educational activities are designed to fit the child's age, developmental needs and cultural background. Medical, dental and developmental screenings are completed annually for each child and health observations are conducted each day. Dental hygiene includes daily tooth brushing. Breakfast and lunches served at the center provide one-third to one-half of the child's daily nutritional requirements. Center based programs are open for the children 3½ to five hours a day. Program hours are decided by parents at a local Policy Committee meeting. All centers have teacher-directors and teacher aides, and many centers also have cooks and maintenance specialists. Staff and community members, who are often parents of Head Start children, are hired by the local Policy Committee.

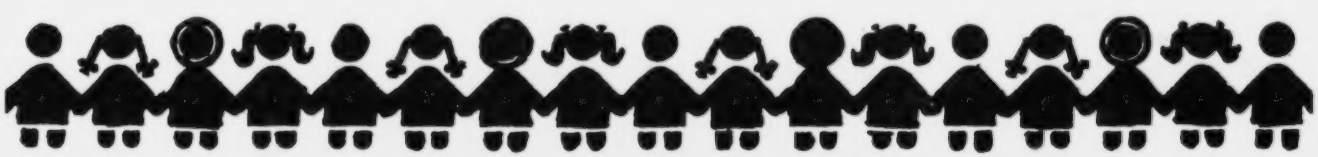
In the home based programs, Head Start services are brought directly into the home of the children. The home based teacher helps parents to learn how to be more involved in the development of their children. Parents, as educators, learn how to turn common living experiences into learning opportunities for their children. Parents become more aware of what children are learning as they help wash dishes, make beds, go grocery shopping or repair a snow machine. The home based teacher visits the home once a week to discuss, plan and carry out activities with the parents. Once or twice a month, children share in special group experiences such as visiting a Head Start center, taking a trip to a fire station, or to a library for activities directed at language development.

The parent-child program places special importance on the teaching role of the parent. In this program, services for families and children from the prenatal period until the children are 3 years of age, are brought to the home. A "home visitor" meets with each family twice a week to help parents integrate books, toys and homemade activities into a home based setting that improves the chances of a positive parent-child relationship. The primary emphasis of the home visit is on verbal interaction between the parent and child. Parents receive materials and training in early childhood development, infant health, nutrition and home safety. As they learn about educational activities that can be done in the home, parents come to understand their importance as teachers. Monthly activities for the children are planned and coordinated by the families (RurAL CAP, 1980).

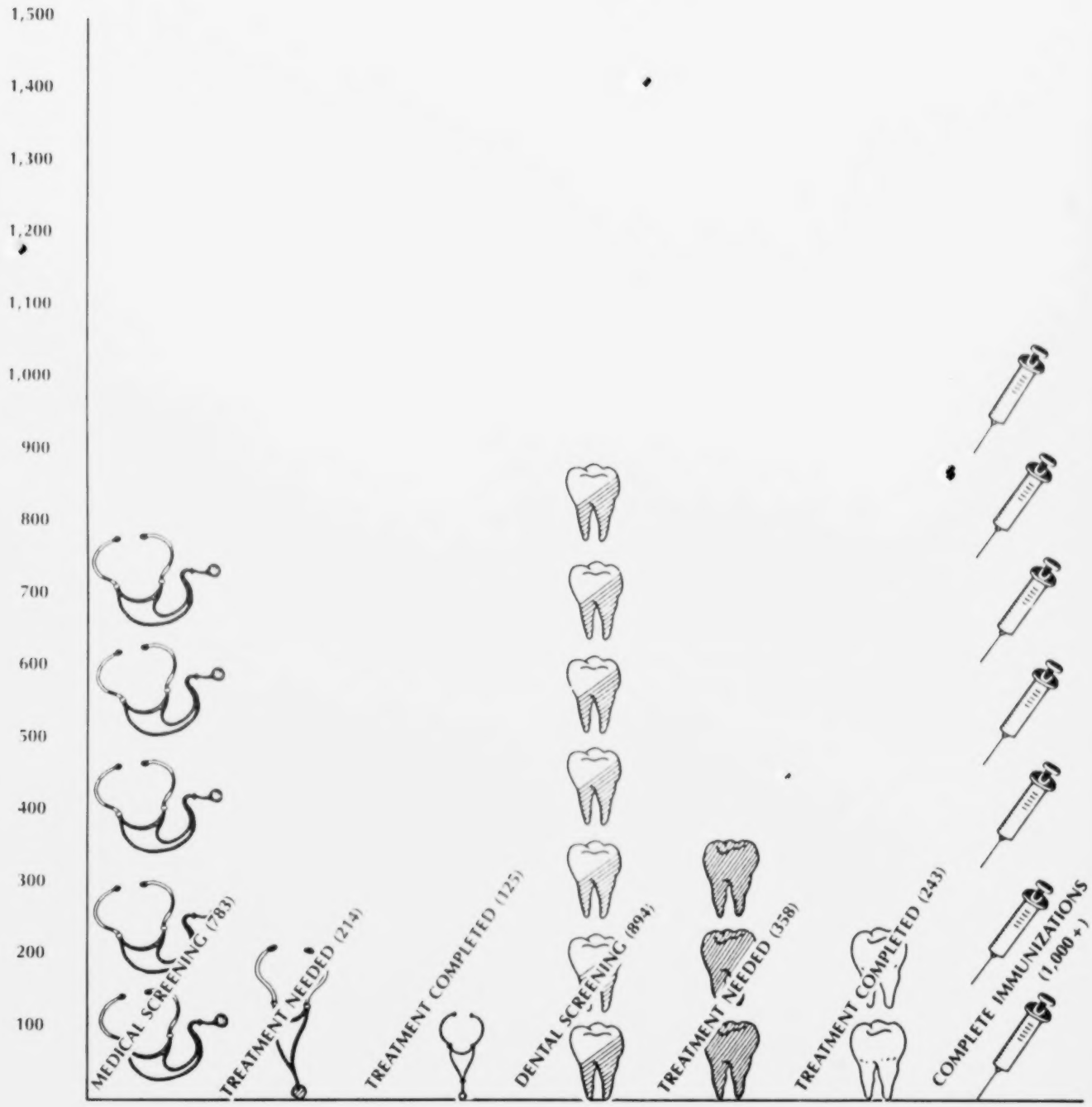
In FY83, nearly 1,500 Alaskan children were enrolled in Head Start, either in center based, home based or parent-child programs. As described above, these children were provided educational, social, nutritional, health and special services. While the goal of Head Start is to provide all these services to every child based upon his or her need, inadequate resources and problems in delivering comprehensive services, particularly in rural Alaska, continue to present difficulties in meeting the goal. However, even within these constraints, substantial assistance was provided.

In addition to developmental and educational activities that all Head Start children received in FY83, 783 children between the ages of 3 and 6 received medical screening through Head Start. Of those, 214 were found to need treatment and 125 had completed the necessary treatment by the end of the school year. Dental screening was provided to 894 children, with 358 found to be needing treatment, of which 243 children completed treatment by the end of the year. Over 1,000 of the Head Start children had up-to-date immunizations by the end of the year, representing nearly 70% of Alaska's Head Start children. Nationally, less than 50% of all economically disadvantaged preschool children have completed immunizations (Children's Defense Fund, 1984).

Head Start staff and administration report that more children would have received medical and dental services if these services had been more available. In remote regions of Alaska, where many Head Start programs are located, these services are provided by agencies and individuals on an itinerate basis. Often the service is available only one or two days a year. If the child or family cannot keep the appointment or the caseload does not permit all Head Start children to be seen, it may be another year before the next opportunity arises.



Head Start in Alaska, as well as nationally, provided the largest number of settings where preschool handicapped children were integrated with non-handicapped children. One hundred sixty-four (164) professionally diagnosed handicapped children were enrolled in Alaska Head Start programs in FY83 — slightly over the 10% required enrollment. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of these were diagnosed as having severe to mild articulation and language disorders. Other handicapping conditions included: visual impairments, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, chronic health impairments, mental retardation, motor impairments, and behavioral disorders. Of these children, 86 were identified as needing only a small amount of special services; 73 required substantial special services; and four needed "almost consistent" special services. Head Start provided these special services in coordination with other agencies in 73% of the cases. Other



ALASKAN CHILDREN RECEIVING MEDICAL AND DENTAL SERVICES THROUGH HEAD START (1982-83)

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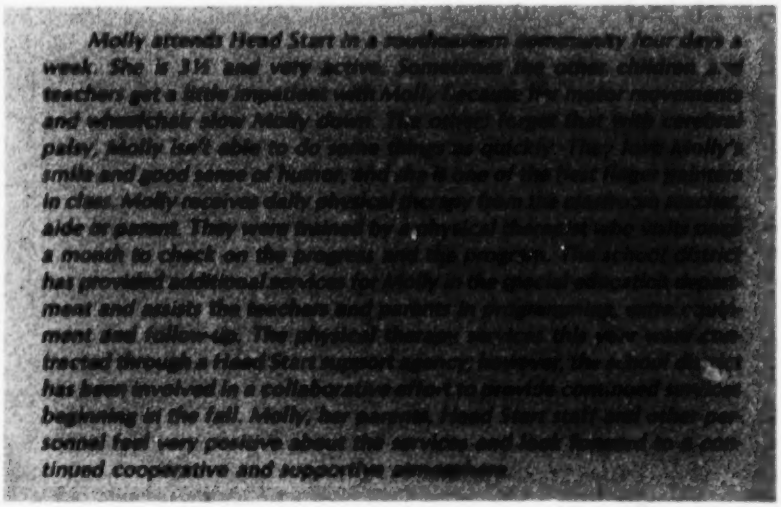
agencies provided the services in 24% of the cases. The special services provided to these children included special education, speech therapy, counseling, special equipment, family counseling, and occupational therapy. Technical and diagnostic assistance and training in special education methods and curricula are provided statewide to Head Start staff by the Resource Access Project (RAP), a federally and state funded project located in Anchorage. The RAP staff assists with the identification and diagnosis of handicapped children and provide the Head Start classroom staff with training in teaching methods and materials appropriate for the child.

In Alaska, both Head Start and the Department of Education (DOE) have responsibility for providing special education services to handicapped children between the ages of 3 and 6. In some school districts the Head Start and the school program coordinate and work together effectively. However, in some locations there remain many problems in cooperative efforts. In 1984, the Alaska Head Start Director's Association (AHSDA) and the Alaska Department of Education (DOE), developed a cooperative agreement that addresses each agency's responsibility to handicapped children and suggests ways to cooperate and share resources to better serve the children.



In recognition of the importance of the family's well-being for the child, Head Start also provides services and assistance to the parents and family. In 1982-83, 1,094 families with children were enrolled in Head Start in Alaska. Of these, a "family needs assessment" was completed for 934 families, and 192 families were found to be in need of some form of social service. These services were provided by Head Start alone in 39% of the cases. The remaining families were referred by Head Start to other agencies.

Staff

Significant factors in the Head Start success story in Alaska are the practice, both out of necessity and preference, of hiring local paraprofessionals who are then provided ongoing training, and the recruitment, training and retention of large numbers of volunteers, including parents. In 1982-83, all of the services to 1,500 children and 1,094 families were made possible in Alaska by a total of 262 paid staff — statewide — 149 of whom were classroom staff! Of the 262 total staff, 117 of these were parents of children who were currently, or had been at one time, enrolled in Head Start. The practice of hiring and training parents is part of the Head Start philosophy that parents are the most important influence on a child's development. It is also a Head Start goal to hire members of the local community and to provide assistance for parents in gaining employment. Thus, in addition to being a comprehensive preschool program, Head Start serves as a vocational education program in many local communities. Head Start also recruited 1,473 volunteers, of which 922 were parents and the remainder were other individuals including foster grandparents.

While the policy of hiring local people and relying on volunteers is a major factor in the comparatively low cost per child of Head Start programs, the policy presents a serious challenge for the training and development of necessary skills in order to maintain a high quality of service. Therefore, a program of ongoing staff development is an integral part of every Head Start project. A recent study found that staff training and development was one of the major factors contributing to the effectiveness of Head Start services in improving a child's cognitive ability (Harrell, 1983). Training opportunities in Alaska include on-site consultants, conferences and workshops, and enrollment in formal courses on child development.

Many Head Start staff members have been and are currently participating in higher education coursework through community colleges and are working on earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate. CDA training and certification is a nationwide, competency-based training program primarily derived from Head Start staff and skills. The training involves coursework alongside regular classroom experience with children. CDA candidates are observed and evaluated in their interaction with children. It takes an average of two to three years to earn a CDA certificate. Limited federal funds are available to Head Start staff for training and, in Alaska, programs use some of their state Head Start grant money for training their staff in the necessary skills for delivering Head Start services. In FY83, over one-half of the Alaska Head Start classroom staff was involved in formal training, mostly in CDA programs.

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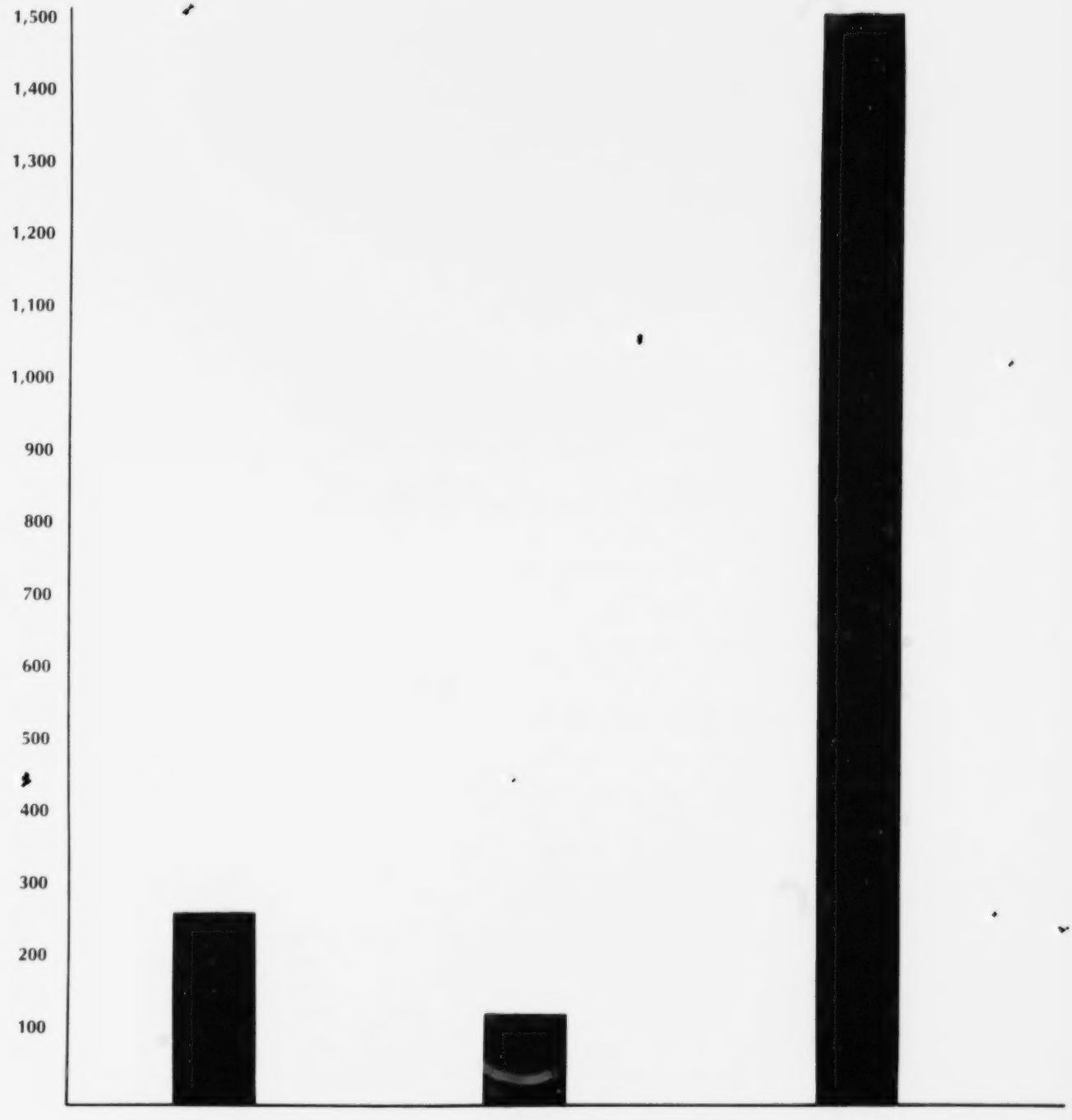

ALASKA HEAD START STAFF (1982-1983)

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Exemplary Practices

Because of unique circumstances related to difficulties of communication, training and providing services in rural Alaska in order to provide comprehensive child and family services, the Alaska Head Start programs have developed exemplary practices to meet these special needs.

A dental caries project conducted by RurAL CAP raised awareness across the state about the need for proper dental hygiene through a parent and community educational program. In the late 1970s, the Head Start grantees formed the Alaska Head Start Director's Association (AHSDA) to promote cooperative efforts and statewide planning. The Association is supported by private dues from the members of the nine grantees, the Resource Access Project and The Alaska Federation of Natives. The Association meets three times a year to share ideas, identify problems and to plan for the future. It has developed and shared special materials that are adapted for use in Alaska. It has facilitated the development of special projects that have benefited Head Start children and families statewide. A parent education project raised awareness about otitis media, an inner ear infection, which can cause hearing impairments. In fact, the incidence of the infection declined for a few years following the project. More recently, in an effort to plan for serving more severely handicapped children, the Association requested one of its members, the Resource Access Project, to conduct a study to identify the number, location and current services available to severely handicapped young children in the state. This report, "Survey Report of Severely Handicapped Children in Alaska Ages 0-5," is the first such report in Alaska.

The Association also developed a cooperative agreement with the Alaska Department of Education (DOE) for serving preschool-aged handicapped children. The agreement has been signed by the Alaska DOE, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, and Office of Human Development Services. It describes strategies for serving handicapped children more effectively, with less duplication of effort.

An indication of the quality of the activities, programs and materials from Alaska Head Start is the fact that they have been replicated by other organizations. For example, the Resource Access Project (RAP) provides technical assistance, training and materials to Head Start centers to help them serve handicapped children, and the Alaska Department of Education (DOE) replicated this service three years ago for school districts serving preschool aged handicapped children. The Upper Tanana Parent-Child Program serving Tok, Tanacross, Northway, Tetlin, Mentasta, Eagle and Dot Lake, is a Head Start replication — solely run with state funds. Other Alaskan materials developed by RAP have been replicated for use in Head Start prototypes in third world countries.

In 1980, the Association created the Early Childhood Coordination Project to help with statewide planning and dissemination of information on issues related to Head Start and child development throughout the state. The project facilitated the development of a state Association for the Education of Young Children, which is part of a national association representing professionals that work with and teach preschool aged children. The project also maintains a newsletter that has a statewide distribution of nearly 2,000 individuals and programs.

Thus, Head Start in Alaska has gone beyond more conventional Head Start programs in order to meet the special needs of Alaska's children and families. This effort to excel has been and continues to be dependent to a large degree upon the state and local commitment to Head Start.

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State Funding of Head Start

The State of Alaska currently provides 40% of the Alaska Head Start dollar — a significant contribution. Head Start is able to provide the comprehensive services mentioned in this report at a total cost per child that is less than the cost per child for public education in Alaska. The average cost per pupil in public school is $6,421 (DOE, 1984), and the average cost per pupil in Head Start is $4,464. However, the Head Start figure does not include the cost of the facility in some instances where it is donated, which is an example of the community involvement that has made Head Start such a success. Donations and volunteer hours not only keep the costs down but increase community involvement and support.

The current state fiscal commitment is an acknowledgement of two facts: (a) that Head Start is good for Alaska's children and families, and (b) that providing comprehensive services in Alaska is particularly challenging in rural and remote Alaska. In recognition of the cost differences among the regions of Alaska, the Alaska Head Start Director's Association prepares a yearly plan for the distribution of state Head Start dollars. This plan is an attempt to take into account regional cost factors and to facilitate the ability of a child in Nome to receive the same services in Nome as does a child in Anchorage. Thus, the federal dollar is the "floor," and the state dollar is used to adjust costs to meet state and regional needs, as well as to improve the overall quality of the services provided to children and families.

State funds have allowed some centers to serve more children and purchase more services. Some programs are run solely on state funds, while others have been able to reduce their waiting lists because of state funds. Thus, state funds are helping to provide the quality of service that otherwise would not be possible. Staff training, materials and parent services are enhanced by the state's contribution to Head Start.

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Existing Problems and Recommendations

With local, state and federal support, Head Start will continue to provide comprehensive services to children and families in Alaska. However, with budget cuts and threats of program modifications at the federal level, state and local support becomes increasingly important. These changes are summarized in a recent report by the Children's Defense Fund:

"In the 1982 fiscal year, elimination of the Public Service Employment component of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), caused Head Start programs to lose 6,000 workers who served more than 50,000 children. That same year the program lost almost $20 million from the Child Care Food Program, which provides money to serve meals in Head Start and child care programs. It lost approximately $12.1 million from the Title XX Social Services Block Grant, which funds a variety of social services for Head Start families. Recent reductions in other federal programs, like Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, have further eroded the ability of Head Start to fulfill its comprehensive mandate."

— CDF, 1984, p.172

To meet the demands of families needing early childhood settings for their children and to continue the effort of prevention of developmental and health problems, Head Start must be increased both through funding as well as improving the delivery of support services.

An increase in state and local funds would further enable Alaskan Head Start centers to meet the challenges of remote regions, such as shipping and transportation costs, fuel costs, adapting early childhood materials to meet local cultural needs and purchasing medical, dental and special services. Additional funds would allow children and families currently on waiting lists to receive services. And the quality of those services would continue to increase. Staff training and salaries could be increased to enhance program quality. Services that are dependent upon other agencies and professionals may be purchased more often. For example, medical and dental services could be made available on more frequent schedules, or speech therapists could be hired to serve more children.

Finally, increased or redistributed resources would help Head Start programs to buy or construct facilities. Many Head Start programs are housed in facilities that are inappropriate for children, require substantial remodeling, or are only temporary. Programs often pay to remodel a building and then find that they must move again the next year. In many cases, Head Start staff and families do not know where the program will be located each year until it is nearly time to begin the new school year.

In two recent studies of early childhood programs in Alaska, including Head Start centers, both the state Department of Education (DOE) and the Early Childhood Coordination Project (ECCP), reported that three of the most commonly expressed needs were: money, training and facilities (ECCP, 1984). Furthermore, nearly all of the programs in the ECCP study reported waiting lists of children that they were unable to serve because of a lack of space.

Head Start services and children and families in Alaska would be enhanced by:

- Increased funding for Head Start to expand Head Start services to more families. In a survey of local communities to identify the need and preference for particular early childhood services, fifteen Alaskan communities responded that they would like a Head Start program (RurAL CAP, 1984); twenty communities want a parent-child program. Also needed is increased funding for support services — currently medical, dental and social services are often available for only one or two days per year to Head Start families in rural Alaska. Frequently, children and families are unable to get to the service at the appointed time due to illness, inclement weather or scheduling problems;
- Increased training opportunities through state and local agencies and institutions of higher education — such as the education and training grants currently available to day care providers through the Department of Community and Regional Affairs;
- The provision and/or construction of Head Start facilities that would be designed as early childhood facilities and would provide stability to the program year after year;
- Sharing the components and philosophy of Head Start including parent education and involvement, comprehensive family services and ongoing staff development with other early childhood settings.

"I'd like to see the construction of Head Start buildings that are constructed from a child's perspective — children live in a world of knees. I would like to see state capital funds used for construction of Head Start buildings so that they can be places designed for early childhood programs and not continue to be pushed from pillar to post. I also hope to see state loan programs loan money to Head Start programs that have been in existence for awhile so that they don't have to continue to rent space that wasn't built for children." — Representative Niilo Koponen, 1984

"Head Start is a dream — that comes true and then changes . . . we must always keep dreaming . . ."

— Marilyn Webb, Chairperson,
Alaska Head Start Director's Association, 1984

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Parents' Comments

"There is no investment more worthwhile in the social service area than an investment in our children, the future of our nation, and our world."

"Both the social aspect and the learning aspect of this program are very important to children in our community. I'll help support this program in any way I possibly can."

"I was a Head Start parent in 1978. Head Start was a great opportunity for my son, Lincoln, who was an only child and needed some social skills. He learned a lot in that area and also in self-control. I know it helped him immensely. It was really nice for me also to be able to have some time to myself. I didn't have extra money for a babysitter and no car to get extra things done (like the laundry). I was hired in November 1979 as the Bus Driver Teacher Aide for Anchorage Head Start. I think the thing that overwhelmed me was the vast knowledge to be obtained at Head Start (training, the people I worked with, the offices, library and curriculum files). I have learned so much! After three years as Bus Driver Teacher Aide, I was the Health Aide for one year. Now I am a teacher in the Anchorage Head Start program this year. I am the Anchorage representative on the Staff Development Committee and have received my C.D.A. (Child Development Associate). I have learned a lot about early childhood and feel you can only continue to learn in this wonderful environment that Head Start has — an environment where you are encouraged, recognized and given the opportunity to grow and gain knowledge. I am PROUD to say I work for RurAL CAP Head Start."

"I have 4-year-old twins — a boy and a girl. Last year they were in a Head Start home based program, and this year they will be in a center. These programs involve parents and community in good, wholesome activities that enrich the lives of everybody involved, especially the children. I have a baby and second grader too, and I can't tell you enough how much my twins will have benefited by the end of this year as well as myself."

"Being 21 years old and finding yourself alone with two preschoolers with a temporary job working in a bag factory can be a very depressing situation. Finding Head Start saved my sanity. I find it difficult to even begin to list the benefits that not only my two children received in their growth and development, but what it has done for our family unit and myself personally. You could say the three of us have grown up with Head Start. I started as a volunteer in my daughter's classroom, and one wonderful day I filled out an application for a Teacher Aide position, was hired and never more did I "wish my days away" as I had in the factory. So exciting and educational was my position that after six years, I was hired as a Teacher and a few years later as an Education Specialist. The opportunities Head Start has provided to us are phenomenal. Our lives are richer than I had ever imagined they could be."

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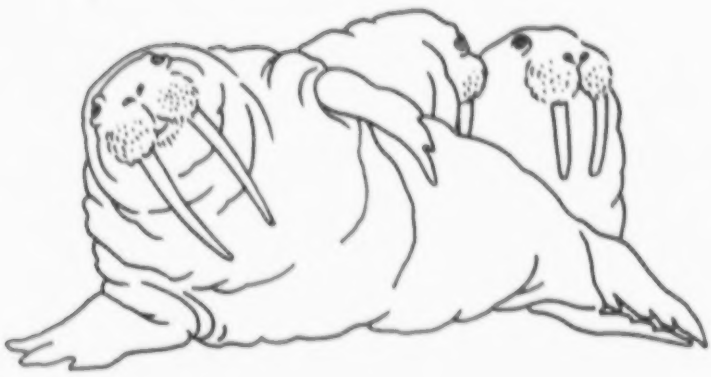

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